



Good day, my name is Barry Eisenberg and I am the Vice President of Technical Services for River Ranch Fresh Foods. My responsibilities include the food safety, quality and research programs. River Ranch produces spinach, cut salads that include iceberg and romaine, and cut vegetables. We also pack cartons directly in the field. Our products are for the retail and food service sales. We do have the exclusive rights to the Popeye Spinach Label.

We operate out of Salinas, CA for eight months of the year and for the winter we process all products in our El Centro, California Plant. Our production regions Salinas, and San Benito Counties. We also source product from El Centro, Yuma and the Huron. A limited amount of product comes from Mexico, Chile and Guatemala. All of our production is contracted.

Together with so many other companies we have implemented the California and Arizona Leafy Greens Standards. Growers and harvesters have accepted these standards and they have focused everyone on what the industry and other experts consider the primary areas that could lead to field food safety issues.

Retail and food service customers continue to demand more and more from us. There does seem to be a correlation between the last meeting they attended and calls asking us for something new. It is not uncommon that if we refuse to follow customer's new standard that they tell us they will go to your competitor. Needless to say, in the present business environment we cannot afford to lose a customer.

River Ranch Fresh Foods is in full support of the National Leafy Greens Initiative for many reasons. Briefly, food safety is a critical concern for all of us and we firmly support the science and technically based understanding that people, compost, water supplies and animal intrusion are sources of contamination that can be monitored, and reacted to so that consumers have a safer product. One national program focused on assessing and acting on these risk factors will create a safer fresh vegetable food supply and gain consumer confidence.

I will not go into detail, but gaining consumer confidence is essential. The implementation of a single program across the nation will show consumers a proactive approach to food safety and government involvement in ensuring food supplies.

The industry has learned that food safety recalls are no longer an issue for a single company, but for an entire industry. One grower, harvester or processor who does not fully understand or follow proper food safety practices can jeopardize and entire industry. The discussion of standardization has been met with; impossible "one size

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does not fit all". I am in full agreement with this statement. But, this should apply to the application of good agricultural practices not to the practices themselves.

We have come a long way since the LGMA had been implemented. All of us grew into the program identifying areas that needed to be better defined and educating our suppliers. But, no one disagreed that the risks identified were factors that could contribute to a food safety concern. It must also be noted that without a single national program, our customers will continue to develop and force us to implement practices that are not science based. The confusion amongst growers is real and leads to leadership questions. One of our growers has nine different manuals to follow on his shelf.

Many of us have concerns as we hear others mention that we have never had a problem, or it costs too much, or this is just another attempt by the government to get more involved in my business. This directions creates a major concern...are they waiting for an issue then start a program?

Finally, I do believe that most growers and harvesters in the United States are following good agricultural practices. But, the only way we are going to improve consumer confidence is to implement process management practices that include an audit based system focusing on agreed to standards that are founded on science and the best technical input we have today.

A National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement will show strong leadership by involving experts from industry, the government, universities and other disciplines to improve the safety of the US food supply. Yes, there will be challenges and as is the case with the LGMA each issue will be evaluated and addressed. We must start movement in this direction if we are to regain consumer confidence by giving them a safer product.